

Which Way to Turn?

Many new soaring pilots seem to spend too much time and attention on deciding which way to turn upon finding a thermal. Most instructors will tell you that it isn't at all uncommon to fly completely through the thermal before the decision has been made! Yet the decision itself is, or should be, really straightforward.

There are all sorts of methods in use out there, and that in itself sometimes makes it even more difficult for beginning glider pilots to choose. Here's an easy and proven way to make the decision painlessly—and quickly!

The 5 Rules For Deciding Which Way to Turn:

(simply go down the list and apply the first rule that applies)

1) If close to high terrain, turn away from the terrain

--you don't want to collide with the terrain, nor do you want (if low) to drift downwind and into the sink beyond the crest

2) If close to other traffic, turn so as to minimize the collision risk

--this includes matching the turn direction in use by another glider already climbing in the thermal you're about to use

3) If you sense one wing being lifted by the thermal, turn toward that wing

--the thermal core is likely to be in that direction

4) If you're on a generally cross-wind heading, turn into the wind

--the upwind edge is likely to be the strongest part of the thermal

5) If no other rule applies, recall what turn direction you used in the last thermal you used, and turn the opposite way

--you want to develop equal facility with turns in either direction

In most cases, only one or two of these rules will apply, and since you'll normally count 3 seconds of good lift before turning into a thermal anyway, you'll find it easy and fast to decide which direction to turn, clear the airspace in that direction, and be ready to start the turn when the 3 seconds are up.